

# VERIFIED VERSION

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Budget Estimates 2016–17

Melbourne — 18 May 2016

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Ms Fiona Richardson, Minister for Women,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Deputy Secretary, Social Policy and Service Delivery Reform, and

Mr Justin McDonnell, Assistant Director, Women and Family Violence Royal Commission Branch,  
Department of Premier and Cabinet.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry into the 2016–17 budget estimates. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

I would like to welcome the Minister for Women, the Honourable Fiona Richardson, MP, Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Mr Justin McDonnell, Ms Amber Griffiths and Mr Ticchi.

All evidence is taken by this committee under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Comments made outside the hearing, including on social media, are not afforded such privilege. Witnesses will not be sworn but are requested to answer all questions succinctly, accurately and truthfully. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty.

Questions from the committee will be asked on a group basis, meaning that specific time has been allocated to members of the government, opposition and crossbench to ask a series of questions in a set amount of time before moving onto the next group. I will advise witnesses who will be asking questions at each segment.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard, and you will be provided with proof versions of the transcript for verification as soon as available. Verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible.

All written communication to witnesses must be provided via officers of the PAEC secretariat. Members of the public gallery cannot participate in the committee's proceedings in any way and cannot photograph, audio record or videorecord any part of these proceedings. Members of the media must remain focused only on the person speaking. Any filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing.

I now invite the witness to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Thank you, Chair and committee members, for this session on the portfolio of women.

### **Visual presentation.**

**Ms RICHARDSON** — The graph that you have before you is an illustration of the investments in the women's portfolio over a four-year period. What you can see from that is that investment in the women's portfolio has historically been extremely low compared to other investments. We are seeking to address that. Clearly if you want to end the harm of family violence, you need to do a great deal more in the women's portfolio space.

The gender equality strategy, which we announced last year, is at the heart of so much of the work that we are doing in the women's portfolio. It is of course directly linked to our family violence imperative. It has had a consultation paper. Over 200 submissions have come in, and we are now working on some further consultations that will take place with the private sector and other key groups in order to finalise the strategy. Gender equality is of course key to ending the harm of family violence. As I said earlier, the research is in: countries that have more equal status between men and women and better attitudes about women also enjoy less violence against women. In the past we have talked about gender equality in the frame of fairness and also in the frame of economics. Now, importantly, we are talking about the need to reduce violence against women by delivering gender equality.

In terms of women's programs, these are the kinds of programs that we wish to build upon. They in a sense are in part a foundation, but you can see looking at that list that there is more work to be done including the Victorian women's governance scholarship program, which delivers over 30 scholarships to strengthen the number of women who make application to board positions, for example, through the Australian Institute of Company Directors. The Victorian women's honour roll is also a very important educative tool, and we have put in place some measures to ensure that a wider audience understands the achievements of women here in Victoria.

The key achievements: there is of course the gender equality strategy. We have as a consequence of the Women on Boards initiative seen 51 per cent of all paid board appointments being filled by women. Also respectful

relationships; 20 women were inducted to the honour roll; and 34 were awarded scholarships through the Australian Institute of Company Directors scholarship program.

The 572 investment in family violence, without a doubt, does a great deal not just with respect to family violence but with respect to advancing women in Victoria. It does of course include a significant investment in the prevention of family violence — prevention initiatives. At the heart of all of the work that we are doing in the women's portfolio it is about improving the status of women in Victoria, as it will inevitably drive attitudes about women. If we can get that right for the first time in this state, we will be world leading but more importantly we will end the harm of family violence.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Ward until 4.31 p.m

**Ms WARD** — Minister, we have only got a brief time together, so we will get onto it. I want to go to budget paper 3, pages 8–9. One thing I have long found fascinating is that women compose a great deal of volunteer boards. Whether it is sporting clubs, whether it is libraries, whether it is neighbourhood houses, the majority of the work is done by unpaid women, yet you say in your presentation that 51.7 per cent of our government's appointments to paid boards have been women, which I congratulate you on — it is a very important step. What has been the progress in terms of the overall figures of women on boards, how is the policy working and what are the main barriers that you have found in trying to get women, or encourage or help women to get, onto paid positions on boards?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — In terms of outcomes and women on boards — that particular commitment made by the Premier in March last year — we have seen the total percentage of women on paid government boards rise from 38 per cent to over 45 per cent as a consequence of our determination to fill 50 per cent of all paid board positions —

**Ms WARD** — So that has been the turnaround in one year?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes, that is right, for paid government boards. This has had an impact on the overall number of boards but not as great because there are, as you highlighted, many more non-paid boards than paid government boards.

The kinds of barriers that we know exist — and the best way to illustrate this is a study that asked men, 'If you were applying for a job, how many of the key criteria do you need to meet in order to apply for the job?'. They said, 'About 2 out of 10'. When women were asked that question, they said, 'Actually, we need eight or more before we will apply for positions'. So we know that we actually have to encourage more women to think about their qualifications and to step up to board positions, apply for these positions, but we also need to address the unconscious bias that is clearly in place, the barriers that are in place, that result in women not being able to obtain leadership positions on boards.

If you have a look at the ASX 200 companies, there are in fact more people named Peter than women in the chairs —

**Ms SHING** — That is P-E-T-E-R, not P-E-T-A?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — That is it — P-E-T-E-R — than there are women in the chairs positions and CEO positions. So at the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Women on Boards — there are various organisations that are seeking to change that. We also need, as the biggest business in town — the state government — to ensure that we are doing all that we can to improve the status of women across the board.

**Ms WARD** — What other initiatives are there to promote women in leadership?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — The Australian Institute of Company Directors does run a scholarship program to provide training for directorships and the like. That has actually been a very successful program. It is one that we are continuing with and I think will no doubt be the foundation of other initiatives that we need to put in place. There is a women's register. It would be true to say that it is not up to the 2016 scratch that you would expect for an online register and what people would want to see in terms of the portal. I am not an IT person but that is how I would describe it. So there is some work that we need to do to build on the women's register, because that will enable obviously more women to access board information, and then it is our hope that they will actually apply and then be successful.

**Ms SHING** — Minister, I might take you to the nagging and persistent perception that there are insufficient numbers of women with suitable expertise to serve on boards. It is something which we see as a dogged feature of the private sector but which we have also seen in recent times around tackling female participation in paid and unpaid government boardrooms. I would be interested in any information you can provide, and again I would refer you to budget paper 3, pages 8 and 9, around the achievement of equality for Victorian women in relation to how we deal with tackling that perception.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — For some time people have spoken about the need to encourage more women and the need to change the thinking of decision-makers in business and in the public sector. The truth is that we have actually not just here in Victoria but in Australia gone backwards with respect to women's leadership. When the UN regarded our standing as compared to other countries we were at 24 over 12 months ago; we have now dropped to 36 in comparison to other countries around the world. That has led to people like Elizabeth Proust and others actually calling for quotas for board positions in the private sector for the first time, because the pace of change is so incredibly slow. In fact the UN had a look at the current pace of change and calculated how long it will take for the status of women and men to be equal, and they calculated it will come in in 117 years.

**Ms SHING** — We may yet still be sitting around this table, Minister.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — I certainly will not be. Neither will my daughter.

**Ms SHING** — Never underestimate the benefits of science!

**Ms WARD** — Not even in our daughters' lifetime.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — No, tragically that is right. So there is work to be done. There is a need to talk about unconscious bias, and can I say with respect to equality in particular: it is not actually just women who benefit from this; it is men as well. So men from diverse communities are not reflected in decision-making around Australia — men with a disability, men from various backgrounds, Aboriginal men.

**Ms SHING** — Well, culturally and linguistically diverse representation as well. I used to tick about all the diversity boxes when I was a trustee director on a super board. The thing is that we see, again, persistently a lack of women on boards because of the perceived notion that there are not enough women from within an applicant pool to actually qualify on merit and thus quota comes in as this pernicious excuse for perhaps levelling the playing field. How do we tackle that?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — One of the things that top CEOs are doing to improve the status of women is that they are actually embedding notions of good economic outcomes as they are trying to improve the status of women in the workplace.

**Ms SHING** — Based around more diverse board composition?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes, precisely. Because the research shows that if you have more diverse decision-making around the table — it is not rocket science, I know — —

**Ms SHING** — Apparently it is, Minister.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — There is a great deal of research around the world and here in Australia that shows that if you have women and more diverse decision-makers on company boards and in the public sector and the like, you get better outcomes. In fact earlier this year — —

**Mr DIMOPOULOS** — Like the Victorian cabinet.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes, I would argue that most certainly. But the Peterson Institute earlier this year actually reported that companies that have a reflection of women on boards and in their top managerial positions actually had a 15 per cent improvement in their overall productivity as a consequence of more diverse decision-making.

**Ms SHING** — And is that because there are different approaches to language and to problem-solving and to processes as a result of that diverse involvement in board decision-making?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — What it has shown is that we are all very different, but one study has revealed in fact that women are very focused on accountability and transparency, and it showed that women that are put on boards will go to those questions and drill down in a way that — —

**Ms SHING** — A reflexive deep dive process.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes, and as a consequence of that the company's bottom line is improved.

**Ms SHING** — So all outcomes are improved as a result of that diversity.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — There is certainly enough research to demonstrate that if you are a CEO of a private company or an executive in the public service and you were looking for some easy gains with respect to — —

**Ms SHING** — In shareholders' interests? Yes.

**The CHAIR** — Order! The Deputy Chair until 4.40 p.m.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Absolutely. You would be — —

**Ms SHING** — Thanks, Minister.

**Mr MORRIS** — It is just a quick one for Ms Falkingham, if I can. This will, I am sure, need to be on notice, but I am just wondering with regard to the 2015–16 calendar year, which is obviously not complete yet, but figures to date if we could. What I am seeking is the stats on the number of incidents of bullying that have been reported to the department, to DPC, all the units that DPC includes, including the ministerial offices, and the incidence of bullying in those units, and in particular the incidence of gender-based bullying — whether those figures could be made available to the committee.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — That is not actually part of my division, but I am happy to take that on notice for you.

**Mr MORRIS** — I would have asked the Secretary, but he is not here, so would you take that on board?

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — I am happy to it on notice for you.

**Mr MORRIS** — Thank you.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Can I just say with respect to that, actually tracking behaviour and poor behaviour in workplaces is important. It is a measure that speaks to the status of women and attitudes about women. Whether or not it actually provides the kind of information to make wideranging decisions or forming views that are sound, I do not know that.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — Also the state of the sector report of the public service reports on that quite regularly, and also as part of the work we have just put out a survey to all public servants around these things to give us much richer data in relation to workforce behaviours. So I am happy to provide those reports.

**Mr MORRIS** — Yes, I am familiar with the published sources of course but was just interested in that particular aspect of it. So that would be good.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Budget paper 3, page 298, has the performance measures and outcomes. I am just interested, Minister, how much money is actually provided for women's programs that are not associated with either the family violence activity in the budget or on LGBTI equality?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — For 16–17 — it is teensy, tiny writing — it is 23.8 —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — \$23.8 million.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — in the total output, which is on the original slide, slide 1 of the presentation.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is overall, but I am looking for a breakdown of that that is not to do with family violence or the LGBTI equality.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — The total spend in there does not include the family violence component. That is in the 572, and that is recorded elsewhere. In terms of, for example, the \$15 million LGBTI pride centre, that is reflected also elsewhere in the budget.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So all of that 23.8 is for — —

**Ms RICHARDSON** — But there are some programs for LGBTI programs, so the homophobia program. I am not the equality minister, but I understand that there is an investment for homophobia programs. It is a rural and regional program, so there is an investment that is reflected in that output, but it is predominantly — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Yes, I understand. I am actually asking about the other part, the part that is not family violence or LGBTI.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes. If you give me one moment, I can probably tell you the amount — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Because looking at the performance measures, even some of those are, or most of those actually, are — —

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Can you give me one moment. So 2.5 million is combating homophobia in rural and regional Victoria. The pride centre, as I mentioned earlier, is reflected elsewhere.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is not part of that output, is it?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes, and the \$4 million for LGBTI representatives and community organisations to help support their organisational and leadership capacity.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So is that basically then the balance is the answer to my question?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — So continuing on that, the performance measure there, 'Number of women participating in funded programs, projects and events', is scheduled to increase by about 820 women. Again how many of the programs that are run in both 15–16 and 16–17, if we could, are not directed to family violence or LGBTI areas?

**Ms RICHARDSON** — I guess the best example of a program was the Victoria Against Violence program, which actually made connections with thousands of women in Victoria.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I am looking for ones that are not family violence or LGBTI.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — So the Women in Leadership program of 15–16 — that is, the AICD package — covers the Victorian women's governance scholarship, the Victorian Honour Roll of Women, the UN media peace awards, the Victorian Women's Register, the Go Women Local Government 2016. Those are the kinds of initiatives that are captured in the output measure that you were referring to in your question.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I might put this one to Ms Falkingham again. It is the same question basically, but if I could get a breakdown of the total spend on programs that were, again, not family violence or LGBTI. Again, I am happy to take that on notice if I could get that for 15–16 and then whatever is prospective for 16–17.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — We are happy to do that. As Minister Richardson has just outlined, they are the programs, but we are happy to get you line by line how much has gone into those individual programs in 15–16 and 16–17.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That would be great. While I have got you, Ms Falkingham, how many employees in DPC work in the Office for Women, again not associated with those sectors? You can see a pattern coming here.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — Purely in the Office for Women?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Yes.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — My understanding is it is currently about 12, but that moves up and down depending on points of the year. So obviously we scale up when we have things like the honour roll going on. Victoria Against Violence is another key area where the department does scale up in terms of additional resources, and obviously with the royal commission's work being part of DPC over the last 12 months that number has gone up again. We have seen a massive increase in the women's output group. That is to reflect not only the work around family violence but also to reflect the work around Ms Richardson's agenda around gender equality, which has been a really big, significant focus of work for that unit.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is the sort of thing I am looking at. So the 12 you mention, give or take 1 or 2 — and I am after the non-family violence and non-LGBTI — is that the 12?

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — So they are completely different parts of DPC, and this comes to the issue around the output group bringing them together. What we hope to be able to do over the next 12 months is separate them out, so there is much more transparency around both aspects of equality. So the 12 I am referring to go to the specific women's branch of employees. That does not take into account all the prevention of family violence and the broader family violence implementation work.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — That is pretty much the question I am asking then; that is great.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — But more broadly, with respect to the budget, it is very difficult to separate out women and family violence.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — Yes.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Because obviously it is a gendered crime, and when you look at the 572 package it is very easy to see that a gender equality strategy could obviously fit within the family violence chapter but also within the women's chapter. But I appreciate that you are trying to — —

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — We are asking about when you are talking about women on boards and that sort of stuff as well.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — Yes. You are trying to draw what is in the budget and what it actually reflects.

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — You just mentioned the output structure. The change in the performance measure there on page 289, which again has gone from being 'Women and Equality Policy and Programs' to 'Women, the Prevention of Family Violence and LGBTI Equality Policy and Programs'. What is the reason for that change?

**The CHAIR** — Maybe take that on notice?

**Mr D. O'BRIEN** — I am happy for you to take it on notice.

**Ms RICHARDSON** — We are hoping actually to, as Rebecca said, reflect the two equality concerns with respect to outputs separately in next year's budget.

**Ms FALKINGHAM** — And that will be in consultation with this committee.

**The CHAIR** — Order! I would like to thank the witnesses for their attendance: the Minister for Women, the Honourable Fiona Richardson; Ms Falkingham, Mr McDonnell, Ms Griffiths and Mr Ticchi. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing. A written response will be provided within 14 calendar days of that request.

**Committee adjourned.**